Why Is The United States Losing The War Of Words In The Global War On Terror?

Identifying Causes Of Failure In U.S. Communication Strategy

A Monograph
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    The U.S. (U.S.) Government's ability to influence friends and foes around the world has immense strategic implications that can either enhance U.S. strategic objectives or contribute to a loss of U.S. power. Nine years after the beginning of the Global War on Terror, America's credibility is at an all time low in the eyes of world opinion. This is largely due to the loss of effectiveness of U.S. information management. This paper proposes that the U.S. Government's failure to communicate its strategic message is due to three causative factors–poorly defined policy, no central agency to dictate and manage messages, and an outdated message model. The author analyzes each of these factors and proposes alternatives. Additionally, in order to reinforce this analysis this paper demonstrates a comparison of failed U.S. methodologies to successful Jihadi Extremist methodologies. The author posits that Jihadi extremist communications methodologies are succeeding because they are easily recognizable, managed by a central organization, and rely on the most contemporary media models to target specific audiences. The author concludes that unless the U.S. defines a recognizable message, establishes a cabinet-level information agency, and updates its messaging model, it will never be able to counter effectively the rhetoric of Jihadi extremists.

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Abstract

WHY IS THE UNITED STATES LOSING THE WAR OF WORDS IN THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR? IDENTIFYING CAUSES OF FAILURE IN US COMMUNICATION STRATEGY by MAJ Alfred S. Roach, U.S. Army, 55 pages.

The U.S. (U.S.) Government's ability to influence friends and foes around the world has immense strategic implications that can either enhance U.S. strategic objectives or contribute to a loss of U.S. power. Nine years after the beginning of the Global War on Terror, America's credibility is at an all time low in the eyes of world opinion. This is largely due to the loss of effectiveness of U.S. information management. This paper proposes that the U.S. Government's failure to communicate its strategic message is due to three causative factors–poorly defined policy, no central agency to dictate and manage messages, and an outdated message model. The author analyzes each of these factors and proposes alternatives. Additionally, in order to reinforce this analysis this paper demonstrates a comparison of failed U.S. methodologies to successful Jihadi Extremist methodologies. The author posits that Jihadi extremist communications methodologies are succeeding because they are easily recognizable, managed by a central organization, and rely on the most contemporary media models to target specific audiences. The author concludes that unless the U.S. defines a recognizable message, establishes a cabinet-level information agency, and updates its messaging model, it will never be able to counter effectively the rhetoric of Jihadi extremists.

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People only see what they are prepared to see.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Why is the U.S. losing the war of words in the Global War on Terrorism?[1] This paper argues the principle reason is a lack of a coherent communications strategy that can oppose the messages of extremist Islam. In this monograph, the author will demonstrate that the ineffectiveness of the U.S. Government's effort is due to three principal causes. First, the U.S. Government lacks a coherent Strategic Communication policy. Second, merging the U.S. Information Agency with the U.S. State Department degraded the effectiveness and synchronization of the U.S. government's strategic communication effort. Third, the U.S. has an outdated message model that assumes understanding by foreign audiences regardless of context and perceptions, aggravated by the perception that the U.S.' stated policies do not match its actions on the ground.

The monograph is broken down into four sections that build this argument. The introduction reveals the deplorable state of current global opinion of the U.S., and discusses why strategic communication is important. Section one describes what the role of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) was, outlines the U.S. Government's efforts to institutionalize strategic communication since the USIA was disbanded, and how the U.S. needs such an agency more than ever in the current age of rapid and globalized communication. Section two discusses why the

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[1]James K. Glassman, "How to Win the War of Ideas," *Foreign Policy,* 10 March 2010, 1-5, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/10/how_to_win_the_war_of_ideas (accessed 10 March 2010). Peter Krause, "Public Diplomacy: Ideas for the War of Ideas," *Journal of the Middle East Policy Council,* vol. XVI, Fall 2009, no. 3. Additionally, a survey by the *Center for American Progress* and *Foreign Policy* of over a hundred top foreign policy experts (liberals, conservatives, and moderates) revealed that 84 percent of the respondents believe the U.S. is losing the war on terror due to a failure "in a number of key areas of national security, *including public diplomacy*, intelligence, and homeland security." See "The Terrorism Index." *Foreign Policy*, July-August, 2006.

current message influence model that the U.S. government uses, which is an artifact of 1960's marketing theory, is ineffective due to its presumption that message sent is the message received, despite contextual and cultural lenses by the audience. The final two sections of this monograph are a comparison of the measures taken by Jihadi extremists[2] that have resulted in a highly effective strategic communication effort, and recommendations for the way ahead to re-launch America's message around the world.

How the World Currently Sees the U.S.

The policy of the U.S. of America from the end of World War Two to the present has been to promote democracy, and improve the lives of people worldwide.[3] In his preamble to the 2006 National Security Strategy, President Bush outlines the continuation of that policy despite the obstacles of the War on Terror. Among the achievements he lists are staying on the offensive against terror networks, assisting the Afghans with replacing the despotic Taliban regime with a democratic state, driving al-Qaeda out of Afghanistan, cultivating democratic states in the Middle East, expanding efforts to encourage economic development, and standing up a democratic state in Iraq.[4] This is a meritorious array of efforts, particularly for a superpower that seeks to bring democracy to and improve the quality of life of the less fortunate worldwide. Unfortunately, these are not the intents perceived by other nations and groups. Instead, the Center for Strategic and International Studies' paper, *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America,* highlights a diametrically opposed perception in international public opinion trends:

- A World Public Opinion Poll in June 2007 found that majorities in 10 of 15 countries polled did not trust the U.S. to act responsibly.

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[2]In the interest of clarity in this monograph, the phrase "Jihadi extremist" refers to those individuals who subscribe to the Qutb-ist worldviews of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman Al Zawahiri.

[3]Larry Diamond, "Promoting Democracy," *Foreign Policy* 87, Summer, 1992, 25-46.

[4]George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the U.S. of America*, Washington, D.C.: The White House, (March 2006).

- A BBC World Service poll of more than 26,000 people across 25 different countries in January 2007 revealed that one in two says the U.S. is playing a mainly negative role in the world.

- A poll commissioned by newspapers in Canada, Britain, and Mexico surveyed 3,000 people in late 2006 and found that a majority in all three countries view President Bush as a threat to world peace comparable to Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, North Korea's Kim Jong Il, and Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah.

- A Zogby poll of five Middle East countries (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, and Lebanon) from late 2006 found that a majority in all five reported that their opinion of the U.S. had gotten worse in the past year.

- The Pew Global Attitudes Project revealed in 2006 that there has been a substantial decline in the opinion of foreigners toward the American people since 2002, particularly in Europe.[5]

So why is there such a marked dissonance between how Americans view themselves on the world stage, and how the international public views Americans? Moreover, should this dissonance really matter to the last acknowledged superpower? The answer to the first question is that America has lost its ability to *communicate* its intent effectively (through message and deeds) to audiences around the world. The answer to the second question is a resounding yes--a superpower in the modern global environment must absolutely care about perceptions, as modern warfare is more about cognitive spaces than in maneuver spaces.

What is strategic communication?

Part of the problem the U.S. faces in delivering effective messaging is that there is no overarching U.S. government definition of strategic communication.[6] Strategic communication is a poorly defined concept that has gained prominence in the early part of the 21st Century to reframe the older concept of Public Diplomacy.[7] The best guidance available is the National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication, published in May 2007 upon the

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[5]Center for Strategic and International Studies, *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America* (Washington, DC: CSIS Press, 2007), 17.

[6]Dennis M. Murphy, "The Trouble with Strategic Communication(s)," *Center for Strategic Leadership Paper*, vol. 2-08, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, January 2008, 1.

[7]Bruce Gregory, "Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication: Cultures, Firewalls, and Imported Norms" *Public Diplomacy Institute*, George Washington University, Washington, DC, August 31, 2005, 6.

Bush administration's realization that there was no government-wide integration of its strategic communication effort. The plan was the result of input from over 30 different studies from interagency, academic, public relations, policy, and private sector marketing expertise.[8] The strategy establishes "three strategic objectives to govern America's public diplomacy and strategic communication with foreign audiences: 1) America must offer a positive vision of hope and opportunity that is rooted in our most basic values. 2) With our partners, we seek to isolate and marginalize violent extremists who threaten the freedom and peace sought by civilized people of every nation, culture, and faith. 3) America must work to nurture common interests and values between Americans and peoples of different countries, cultures, and faiths across the world."[9] Unfortunately, this strategy only loosely defines policy, without giving any specifics on ways, ends, or means to execute effective strategic communications.

There is, however, a Department of Defense definition in the most recent Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) (which produced a Strategic Communication Roadmap.) Strategic communication is "focused USG (U.S. Government) processes and efforts to understand and engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable to advance national interests and objectives through the use of coordinated information, themes, plans, programs and actions synchronized with other elements of national power."[10] The Roadmap goes on to list the primary supporting capabilities of strategic communication as Public Affairs, aspects of Information Operations (principally psychological operations), Military Diplomacy, Defense

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[8]US Department of State, "Country's First National Strategic Communications Plan Presented," *Public Diplomacy Update*, 2, no. 3 (2007), 6.

[9]National Security Council Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordination Committee, *U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication*, (Washington, DC.: The National Security Council, May 2007), 3.

[10]US Department of Defense, 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap, Washington, DC (25 September 2006), 3.

Support to Public Diplomacy, and Visual Information.[11] This is the definition of Strategic

Communication used in this monograph.

Why are Strategic Communications Important?

Current conflicts around the world provide numerous examples of the powerful effects

rendered from shaping military operations through strategic communication to influence global

perceptions. Due to the panoramic nature of networked globalized communications, the ability to

determine perception goes to the fastest purveyor of messages. Unfortunately, the U.S.

government, still largely organized along pre-networked industrial-age lines, conducts little

synchronization or cross talk among agencies responsible for conducting strategic communication

efforts. As such, the U.S. is often reacting to events as they unfold, without having clear policy,

talking points, or priority of resources to dedicate to a coherent strategy.

These lessons have captured the attention of senior Defense Department officials,

including Secretary Robert Gates. "We often speak disparagingly about our adversaries, but the

reality is when it comes to strategic communications, they are very 21st century. They are far

more agile than we are."[12] The Department of Defense's Strategic Communication Science and

Technology Plan highlights three poignant examples of how important it is to be the first agency

to deliver effective messages.

The first case cited is the continuing propaganda battle enmeshing U.S. and NATO forces

in Afghanistan over the actual number of civilian casualties resulting from Allied manned and

unmanned airstrikes near towns and built up areas. Immediately following an air strike, the

Taliban posts reports on sympathetic websites of grossly inflated casualty lists, often

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[11]Murphy, 1.

[12]Robert M. Gates, SECDEF, "Hearing of the House Armed Services Committee --Priorities of the Defense Department in the New Administration," House of Representatives, 27 January 2009, 2.

accompanied by video footage of destroyed schools, mosques, and/or homes. These tactics reduce public support for Afghanistan's government and NATO forces by highlighting indiscriminate destruction and careless killings. Of course, all incidents are investigated by Afghanistan's Government and by U.S. and NATO forces, but by the time the results of the investigation are published the Taliban has moved on to its next strategic communication engagement, dragging along the international media, which is primed to seek out whatever source of information is the most expedient.[13] These techniques are not isolated to Afghanistan. The Israeli Defense Forces suffered similar defeats in strategic communication at the hands of Hezbollah during the 2006 war in Southern Lebanon. Hezbollah operated its own radio and television stations throughout the duration of the conflict, pushing minute-by-minute reporting of the "atrocities" being committed against Lebanese civilians. Due to the Israeli predilection for media censorship, Hezbollah's accessible but biased reporting became the go-to source for the international media. As a result, Hezbollah was able to turn a tactical defeat into a strategic victory, all at once generating public sympathy, highlighting Israeli incompetence, and placing international pressure on Israel to explain its actions by Hezbollah influencing global opinion. Despite the lessons learned from this humiliating episode, the IDF was subject to similar strategic communication "warfare" during its recent campaign against Hamas in Gaza.[14]

As outlined in this section, strategic communication is a powerful tool when employed in a proactive, not reactive, fashion. In order to be proactive, however, strategic communication needs to be carefully developed, and then leveraged like any other weapon system, specifically, with care and consideration of the intended results, and in a consistent fashion. The next section

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[13]Strategic Communication Science and Technology Plan "Current Activities, Capability Gaps, and Areas for Further Investment," Director Defense Research and Engineering Rapid Reaction Technology Office, April 2009, 4.

[14]Ibid.

of this monograph will discuss the evolution of the U.S.' strategic communication program, and how that expertise was developed, and subsequently lost.

Section One: U.S. Strategic Communication--Inception to Cold War Zenith, and its Nadir in the Age of Persistent Conflict

America's current global strategic communication framework emerged in fits and starts as a response to its experiences in the world wars of the twentieth century. The first effort, established in 1917, was the Committee on Public Information, (also known as the Creel Committee after its chief newspaperman George Creel), which sought to rally U.S. public opinion behind World War I on behalf of the Wilson administration. Its focus was the domestic audience and used public speakers, advertising, pamphlets, periodicals, and the burgeoning American motion picture industry. As the U.S.' role in World War One expanded, the Creel Committee assumed more and more of the Wilson Administration's overseas information effort, attempting to promote democracy and anti-authoritarianism among foreign audiences.[15] Considered a wartime effort, President Wilson curtailed the Creel Committee's work after July 1, 1918, with domestic activities stopped after the Armistice on November 11, 1918, and foreign operations ended June 30, 1919. Wilson abolished the Creel Committee by Executive Order 3154 on August 21, 1919.

The next major benchmark in the development of American strategic communication came in 1942 with the establishment of the Office of War Information (OWI), which focused both domestically and overseas. Among the OWI's efforts were the Voice of America radio broadcasts, which provided war news from the U.S. perspective to Germany and Occupied Europe. The U.S. Information Service, the OWI's overseas branch, was also brought into being,

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[15]Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 1.

establishing 26 posts in Europe, Africa, and East Asia by war's end.[16] Much like the demise of

the Creel committee, the end of the war saw great pressure levied against the OWI by Congress,

both political and budgetary, to disband the organization.[17] When the OWI finally disbanded the

U.S. Information Service's offices and the Voice of America transferred to the State Department.

The U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act (Public Law 402; 80th Congress)

known as the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, was the legislation responsible for establishing the first

peace-time statutory information agency. The mission of that agency (later named the U.S.

Information Agency) was to promote a better understanding of the U.S. in other countries, and to

increase mutual understanding between Americans and foreigners. The act also limited

transmission of the Voice of America programming to foreign audiences. This was to prevent the

U.S. Government from attempting to influence domestic audiences with directed messages

(propaganda). A constant source of friction of this restriction is the overlap between media in the

U.S. and the feedback from messages by the U.S. government propaganda overseas.[18]

In 1953, under the authorization of the Smith-Mundt Act, President Eisenhower formally

established the U.S. Information Agency (USIA). The President realized that the Cold War was

going to be a protracted contest of wills between the Warsaw Pact and the West that would

require greater emphasis in perception management than prowess on the battlefield. Eisenhower

also realized that in order to win the Cold War, the U.S. Government would have to transmit

effective and synchronized messages on the benefits of freedom, democracy, and liberty. As such,

when the USIA stood up it acquired oversight of all of the information programs, including Voice

of America (its largest element), that were previously in the Department of State, except for the

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[16]Wilson P. Dizard Jr ., *Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the US Information Agency*, (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner Publishers, 2004), 17-34. Hixson, 2.

[17]Hixson, 5.

[18]US Army War College, "Information Operations Primer," Center for Strategic Leadership, Carlisle Barracks, PA., December 2007, 10.

educational exchange programs, which remained at State. The USIA Director reported to the

President through the National Security Council and received complete, day-to-day guidance on

U.S. foreign policy from the Secretary of State.[19]

The USIA's mission, according to President Eisenhower, was to "submit evidence to

peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies

of the U.S. are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom,

progress, and peace."[20] It accomplished this throughout the cold war by a myriad of cultural and

media engagements. The intent was to show the face of democratic states around the world and to

offset the censorship and disinformation of the Soviet Union. Public affairs officers lived in

foreign countries and were often on a first name basis with the heads of foreign media.[21] This

access enabled the U.S. to steer foreign public perception (instead of only influencing political

leadership, which was the method used by traditional diplomacy) by constant engagement,

rebutting misinformation and propaganda from unfriendly organizations, and clarifying American

policies and goals. Foreign media had reliable access to visiting senior U.S. Government officials,

and was always able to tap into the USIA for timely information updates. The Agency's libraries

were open to students eager to learn about the U.S. through book, films, and videos. Additionally,

the Agency offered exchange programs to rising leaders identified by field officers, providing

upcoming influencers opportunities to learn about the U.S. firsthand. In return, a steady flow of

American artists, journalists, scientists, and others were encouraged to visit foreign countries to

lecture and demonstrate U.S. culture.[22]

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[19]Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*" (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 105.

[20]Ibid., 92.

[21]John Hughes, "Needed: USIA's people-to-people message," *Christian Science Monitor,* 15 December 2004, 1-2, available online at http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1215/p09s01-cojh.html (accessed 21 February 2010).

[22]Ibid.

Unfortunately, the USIA became so associated with the Cold War, that it was a victim to victory disease following fall of the Soviet Union. As the Cold War wound down, the agency's funding dried up, and lawmakers questioned whether public diplomacy was necessary on such a large scale. As a result, a State Department reorganization occurred in response to the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 reducing the size of the U.S. foreign affairs establishment. Billed by proponents as an aspect of the State Department's "peace dividend" following the Cold War, it consolidated the USIA, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and some functions of the Agency for International Development by integrating them into the State Department. The Voice of America service, and its management agency, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, separated from USIA and became a separate organization. The remaining USIA billets redistributed throughout the State Department and its mission given to the Bureau of International Information Programs.[23] The demise of USIA is regarded by the public diplomacy community (in retrospect) as having diluted the ability of the U.S. to effectively promulgate a national communication strategy, coordinate and integrate strategic themes and messages, and support public diplomacy efforts worldwide. [24]

Since the dissolution of the U.S. Information Agency, there has not been a centralized and consistent oversight arm for American strategic messages. However, there have been several efforts made to consolidate and organize the U.S. Government effort. The Bush administration retained Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 68, enacted by President Clinton. PDD 68 ordered top officials from Defense, State, Justice, Commerce, and the Treasury, as well as the Central Intelligence Agency, to establish an International Public Information Core Group. The Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs chaired this group at the State

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[23]US Army War College, 10.

[24]US Government Accountability Office, Report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate "U.S. Public Diplomacy: Actions Needed to Improve Strategic use and Coordination of Research" (Washington D.C., July 2007), 1-2. David E. Kaplan, "Hearts, Minds, and Dollars," *U.S. News and World Report*, 25 April 05, 10.

Department. PDD 68 addressed those problems when no single government agency was empowered to coordinate America's efforts to sell its policies and counteract bad press abroad.[25] It is evident, however that this core group is currently inactive.

Other recent initiatives to coordinate and integrate national strategic communication efforts have also faltered. In January of 2003 President Bush signed an Executive Order creating the White House Office of Global Communications.[26] Its mission was to "ensure consistency in messages that will promote the interests of the U.S. abroad, prevent misunderstanding, build support for and among coalition partners of the U.S., and inform international audiences." It would do this, in part, by establishing "information teams" that would "disseminate accurate and timely information about topics of interest to the on-site news media."[27] Unfortunately, the White House Office of Global Communication suffered the same fate of its predecessors that same year.

Some programs never got much further than informal meetings and well-intentioned staffing. For example, the Strategic Communication Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) met on several occasions, but then went dormant. Another White House initiative, the Muslim Outreach Policy Coordinating Committee, was more active and in fact, developed a draft national communication strategy. Unfortunately, that initiative never made it out of the White House.[28] On the other hand, there is an Interagency Strategic Communication Fusion Team, an informal, action-officer coordinating body, that has remained active. Its members share information about their agencies respective plans and activities in order to leverage each other's communication with international publics. The team coordinates and de-conflicts the production and the

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[25]Presidential Decision Directive PDD 68 "International Public Information (IPI)" 30 April 1999, available online at http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd/pdd-68.htm.(accessed 10 December 2009).

[26]The White House, Establishing the Office of Global Communications, "Executive order 13282," Office of Policy Coordination and International Relations, January 24, 2003.

[27]Ibid.

[28]US Government Accountability Office, 10-13.

dissemination of information products but does not task. Instead, team members reach across office, bureau, and agency boundaries to offer or to seek support for their strategic communication plans and activities.[29] Unfortunately, without tasking or organizational authority, these efforts were doomed from the beginning to mere advisory roles.

Shortly after the establishment of the White House Office of Global Communications, the 9/11 Commission published its assessment of systemic failures leading up to the attacks on the World Trade center and the Pentagon. One of the highlighted gaps in U.S. government action was its failure in adhering to the outdated message influence model, and using it ineffectively. Specifically, the report stated that the "U.S. Government must define what its message is, what it stands for . . . [and] . . . must do more to communicate its message. "[30] The Commission suggested new initiatives in television and radio broadcasting in strategically important areas. Shortly thereafter, a Government Accountability Office investigation complained of a lack of interagency communication strategy, concluding "the absence of such a strategy complicates the task of conveying consistent messages to overseas audiences."[31]

So why has the current setup of USIA elements under the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs not worked? In the 12 October 2009 American Diplomacy article "Public Diplomacy Is Trying To Reach And Influence The World But Its State Department Structure Has Problems," Ambassador Thomas Pickering outlines several reasons.

First, under the 1999 merger with State, the lines of authority for public diplomacy were scattered. Specifically, Public Diplomacy offices had no "home base" in Washington, and no set

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[29]Interagency Strategic Communication Fusion Team, Meeting Summary, 27 October 2006, 4.

[30]T. H. Kean, et al. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, New York, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, (2004) 376-377

[31]J.T. Ford, "State Department and Broadcasting Board of Governors Expand Post-9/11 Efforts but Challenges Remain. Testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations," House Committee on Government Reform, August 23, 2004, available online at http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d041061thigh. pdf (accessed 20 October 2009).

of State offices supervised the regional offices. Two examples of this are the bureaus of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and the bureau of International Information Programs, who operate under the Undersecretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, but not under close supervision, nor close to the field. Aggravating this lack of oversight is a reduction in the number of public diplomacy officers, and the offices they work from--despite the requirement for public diplomacy increasing.[32] After the merger, public diplomacy administrative staffs overseas were downsized but their administrative loads increased--a May 2009 Government Accountability Office report identifies that "administrative burdens and staffing policies … limit the time public diplomacy officers can devote to outreach efforts …" Personal contact is the heart of public diplomacy; its officers would get out of embassies more, if their administrative requirements were lessened. [33]

Second, the merging of public diplomacy with traditional diplomacy at State did not account for how the diverse competencies of public diplomacy are managed, including budgets, exchanges of persons, cultural activities, private sector agreements, editing magazines, directing television programs, and producing policy information via the Internet.[34] Ambassador William A. Rugh outlines several lines of failure resulting from this merger. First, the attempt to isolate broadcasting from political influence by consolidating all of the USIA broadcast functions under the Broadcasting Board of Governors failed. By bestowing "eight presidentially-appointed individuals with tremendous authority, broadcasting's public diplomacy functions are often neglected in favor of profit margins and the whims of individual board members."[35] Thus,

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[32]Thomas R. Pickering, et al., "Public Diplomacy is trying to reach and Influence but its State Department Structure has Problems" *American Diplomacy*, 12 October 2009, available online at http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/110.htm (accessed 20 October 2009).

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Elise Crane, "Ambassador William A. Rugh on the Shortcomings of U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Middle East," The Fletcher School of Tufts University, December 2009, available online at

programs like Voice of America's Arab Service, which delivered content aimed at explaining U.S. policies and goals, offered cultural interaction, and thoughtful debate of Middle Eastern media sources were replaced by Radio Sawa and al-Hurra television, which are focused on pop music and entertainment shows in order to draw market share. Adding to this was a lack of oversight in hiring practices of these programs, and a lack of understanding by the staffs of U.S. policy, which resulted in the formula for a disastrous public affairs effort. Ambassador Rugh points out "The content [of al-Hurra] is so poor and irrelevant to the audience that no one watches it. The numbers are almost invisible."[36]

The greatest reason why public diplomacy efforts have failed, Ambassador Pickering highlights, is that all of the Undersecretaries of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs of the past decade have lacked authority over most public diplomacy personnel, resources, and programs. The 1999 merger of USIA with the State Department scattered assets and responsibilities throughout the Department, and required public diplomacy officers to operate in non-public diplomacy roles, diluting the effectiveness of experience in the public diplomacy domain.[37]

As the preceding sections have demonstrated, now more than ever there is a clear need for an oversight agency within the U.S. government to synchronize strategic communications efforts. The efforts and programs of the U.S. Information Agency were largely responsible for winning the propaganda battles of the Cold War. Part of their effectiveness was the employment of the latest techniques of mass communication. Unfortunately, the U.S. Information Agency, with its trained public diplomats and strategic communicators, was disbanded without a successor, and its communication techniques (which were innovative during the Cold War) have

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http://www.fletcher.tufts.edu/news/2009/12/features/rugh.shtml (accessed 10 March 2009).

[36]Ibid.

[37]Pickering, et al.

since become obsolescent. The next section of this monograph will demonstrate that part of the failure of the U.S. to get its message across since the beginning of the Global War on Terror is due to continued use of that outdated messaging model that is not connecting with the intended audiences.

Failure of the Message Influencing Model

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.
George Bernard Shaw

Although America's ability to influence the world is due to a complex set of interactions, one factor has a disproportionate sway on the process. That factor is the outdated *message influencing* model that America has used to communicate its message over the last fifty years.

Message Influencing

The current Western communication model has its origins in communication theories that emerged in the 1950s. One of the most influential communication theorists and the founder of the Michigan State School of Communication, David K. Berlo, published *The Process of Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Practice,* a text that has largely defined communication theory in business and government to the present day. Berlo's theory draws heavily on an analogy that compares human communication to the transmission of messages over a telephone system.[38] This was an expansion of Dr. Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's work in *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Shannon and Weaver postulated that communication is how one mind uses messages to affect another mind. Their model (see figure 1) includes an information source that encodes the message, a signal carries it from a transmitter

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[38]David K. Berlo, *The Process of Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 1-22.

through a channel (where it may be degraded by "noise"), and ultimately to the receiver who is expected to decode it in the same context as it was transmitted.[39]
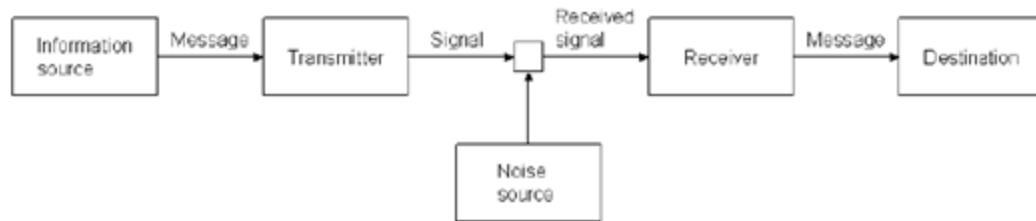

Figure 1. Shannon and Weaver's Model

Berlo applied this model straightforwardly to human communication. His source had "ideas, needs, intentions, information, and a purpose for communicating."[40] The theory was that a *message* created from these aspects and passed through Shannon and Weaver's model would ultimately change the behavior of the recipient. This is known as the *message influence* model ". . . because it conceptualizes messages as a vehicle for carrying information from a source to a receiver."[41]

According to Berlo, a few relevant underlying assumptions exist with the message influence model; first, that communication failures are a matter of interference with either the transmission or encode/decode of a message (e.g., sender or receiver are not sophisticated enough to understand message); second, that the simpler the message and more frequently it is transmitted, the greater likelihood of success. The final, and most problematic assumption is that message transmitted is equal to message received, to wit, that the assumption is the recipient receives and understands the message, without taking in to account the actual effectiveness of the

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[39]Steven R. Corman, et al., "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas" Consortium for Strategic Communication, (April 3, 2007), available online at http://comops.org/article/114.pdf (accessed 20 October 2009), 3.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid., 4.

communication.[42] Unfortunately, the message influence model still dominates post-9/11 methodology in public diplomacy, public affairs, information operations, and media strategy in the U.S. government.

Why message influence fails

The message influence model has failed not for lack of well-intentioned effort by government officials, but because it fails to address the complexities of communication as a *meaning-making* process.[43] This model incorrectly assumes that communication is the transfer of "meanings from person to person" and that the message sent is the one that counts.[44] The fundamental problem is that "*a meaning cannot simply be transferred*, like a letter mailed from point A to point B."[45] Instead, the receiver creates meanings from his own context, including autobiography, history, culture, language, symbology, perceived power relations and personal needs. Thus, meanings listeners create in their minds will probably not be identical to those intended by the receiver. As a result, several decades of communication research has demonstrated that the message *received* is the one that really counts.[46]

In his paper "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas," Steven R. Corman relays a vignette on how the shortcomings of message influencing were evident in Karen Hughes' listening tour of the Middle East in 2005. Attempting to execute the

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[42]Ibid., 4.

[43]Steven R. Corman, et al, "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas" *Consortium for Strategic Communication*, (April 3, 2007), available online at http://comops. org/article/114. pdf, (accessed 20 October 2009) 7.

[44]S. R. Axley, "Managerial and organizational communication in terms of the conduit metaphor." *Academy of Management Review, 9* (1984), 431.

[45]Steven R. Corman, et al, "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas," 7.

[46]H. L. Goodall, Jr., "Why we must win the war on terror: communication, narrative, and the future of national security," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12, 30-59. Also, Bud Goodall, et al. *Strategic Ambiguity, Communication, and Public Diplomacy in an Uncertain World: Principles and Practices.* Arizona State University, June 2006.

Bush Administration's policy of clear and consistent message, and trying to reboot America's image in the Middle East, Hughes said to a group of five hundred Saudi Arabian women:

> I feel, as an American woman, that my ability to drive is an important part of my freedom. It has allowed me to work during my career. It has allowed me to go to the grocery store and shop for my family. It allows me to go to the doctor.[47]

Hughes's sincere attempt to build rapport by demonstrating common needs and relate the benefits of freedoms experienced by American women backfired badly. Instead of inspiration, the audience was deeply offended for several reasons--not the least of which because the Saudi Government restricts by law the very freedoms Hughes was elaborating on. An example of the backlash was the Egyptian daily Al-Jumhuriya's response, "We in Egypt, and everywhere else, don't need America's public relations campaign."[48] Clearly, Karen Hughes's team had not done their homework--delivering a clear message, or repeating the same message from country to country was not enough to communicate effectively. Because Hughes failed to understand the context of the receiver, she failed to communicate, and instead the alienness of the concepts she was trying to extol served to antagonize her audience.[49]

Corman identifies other problems with traditional thinking about communication. First, a larger communication system-of-systems provides the context for message interpretation. Specifically, communication is the context through which individuals and groups construct their social realities.[50] Thus, once a system has developed a reality, it tends to sustain itself despite conflicting information or persuasive campaigns. Members of the system work consciously and unconsciously to preserve the status quo of meaning in the framework. To do this, members

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[47]Steven R. Corman, et al, "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas" Consortium for Strategic Communication, (April 3, 2007), available online at http://comops. org/article/114. pdf, (accessed 20 October 2009)7.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid.

interpret messages that enter their cognitive space through the lenses of what makes the most

sense to their perspective, not how senders intended the message. Therefore, there is no silver

bullet "-no single message, however well-crafted--can be delivered within the existing system

that is likely to change it."[51]

The U.S.' attempts at promoting democracy in the Middle East (one of the Bush

administration's foreign policy goals) illustrate this point. In a November 2003 speech, President

Bush said:

> The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event
> in the global democratic revolution. Sixty years of Western nations excusing and
> accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe --
> because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as
> the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place
> of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export. And with the spread of
> weapons that can bring catastrophic harm to our country and to our friends, it would be
> reckless to accept the status quo. Therefore, the U.S. has adopted a new policy, a forward
> strategy of freedom in the Middle East.[52]

Inarguably altruistic and noble goals from a Western viewpoint, Salafi extremists

interpret this message from a completely different perspective –as yet another attempt by

Crusaders to impose their foreign ways on Muslim lands.[53] An example of the reaction this

address engendered was the fatwa issued by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a "key contemporary

ideologue in the Jihadi intellectual universe,"[54] declaring democracy a "religion" that is at odds

with Islamic principles of monotheism. When placed in this context, the more the U.S. promotes

democracy in the Middle East, the more reinforcement extremists have to their Crusader

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[51]Ibid. 7

[52]George W. Bush, Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, November 6, 2003.

[53]Steven R. Corman, et al., "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas" *Consortium for Strategic Communication*, 7.

[54]Combating Terrorism Center, *Militant Ideology Atlas*. U.S. Military Academy at West Point. (2006).

argument.[55] As with the example from Karen Hughes's listening tour, a "clear and consistent" message is not enough--the transmitter must take into account the context of the audience, and construct a message within that audience's context, or create a new context that does not oppose the current system. Failure to do so results in the current system of understanding to resist any information that does not make sense in its reality.

This property of self-preservation in communication systems means a strategy that repeats apparently straightforward and clear messages is actually amplifying problems of meaning-making, and ultimately discrediting the message sender. Thus, the Western reliance on "talking cures" to solve differences falls on "deaf ears" in the Middle East, especially when both parties are not in interpretive alignment--resulting in escalating misunderstandings and causing more resentment.[56]

Ultimately, the U.S. is facing not just a communications problem in the global war of words, but also a systems problem. The issue is not "can a more persuasive message be delivered" but "what kind of reality has the system we are trying to influence created for itself?"[57] In order to break the cycle of miscommunication between systems, there must first be an understanding of the system dynamics at work; and second, a strategy to alter the existing target systems so that they will re-organize around new meaning-making frameworks.[58]

The key is delivering the message in a manner that the existing reality will accept it. Those who advise the government have identified the importance of addressing the current reality framework in order to communicate effectively. For example, Newton Minnow complained in a

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[55]Steven R. Corman, "Weapons of mass persuasion: Communicating against terrorist ideology," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, vol. V, no. 4 (Winter Supplement 2006), 5.

[56]Steven R. Corman, et al, "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas," 7.

[57]Watzlawick, P., "The construction of clinical 'realities." In J. Zeig (Ed.). The Evolution of Psychotherapy: The second conference. Brunner/Mazel, New York: Pearl, (1992), 64.

[58]Steven R. Corman, et al., "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas," 9.

2003 memorandum that "we have failed to use the power of ideas" and we should be "explaining and advocating our values to the world."[59] We could do this by broadcasting messages that "make our ideas clear not just to leaders in the Muslim world, but to those people in the street." Our superior skill at delivering messages would insure success: "We have and most creative people in the world in our communications industries" who "will volunteer eagerly to help get our message across."[60] A RAND paper in 2004 also concluded that success in public diplomacy is a matter of delivering the right message:

> As important as it is to communicate America's history of support and defense of Muslim populations, it is equally important to communicate the rationale motivating these policies. In these instances, U.S. policies reflected and furthered the values of democracy, tolerance, the rule of law, and pluralism. The overarching message public diplomacy should convey is that the U.S. tries, although it does not always succeed, to further these values regardless of the religion, ethnicity, or other characteristics of the individuals and groups involved. Highlighting the instances in which the U.S. has benefited Muslim populations by acting on these values may make this point more salient. [61]

The paper makes a valid point--the right message is clearly important to effective strategic communication. Nevertheless, it comes up short on the greater issue at hand--it is not just delivering the right message, but delivering it *the right way*, specifically, in a manner tailored to the context of the audience. In the second half of this section introduces two alternative models of messaging that utilize methods to shape context in their attempt to convey effective meaning in messages--*Strategic Ambiguity* and *Pragmatic Complexity.*

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[59]Newton M. Minow, "The Whisper of America," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies,* (August 2003), available online at http://www.defenddemocracy.org/images/stories/file/ WhisperofAmerica_2.pdf (accessed 20 October 2009), 7-10.

[60]Ibid.

[61]C. R. Wolf, et al., "Public diplomacy: How to think about it and improve it, " Occasional paper, RAND Corporation, 2004, 8.

Alternative models

Many of the proposed solutions to message influencing in the strategic communications domain revolve around "repackaging" the message or transmitting more frequently. As the discussion above demonstrated however, the problem is not in content or frequency, but in meaning making. Two models that offer promise originate from the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. The first model, proposed by Professor Bud Goodall, is *Strategic Ambiguity*.

Strategic Ambiguity is a middle-of-the-road theory between the monologue of message influencing and the unattainable (due to disparate and unyielding cultures) ideal of true dialog. Strategic ambiguity theory originates from research focused on building resilient organizations capable of overcoming adversity in complex environments.[62] Emerging in the mid 80s as a response to a flattening trend in business hierarchies, the theory addressed the need of these organizations to be faster and more nimble in their interactions with emerging global markets.[63]

The old paradigm had been monologic just like message influencing--with the same assumption that message control was the standard to measure message effectiveness. Instead, organizational theorists posited that a better system would allow rapid dissemination and responsiveness in order to address the needs of the global marketplace. The organizing principles revolve around wider sharing of information between employees and customers, but more importantly, allowing for local empowerment of meanings associated with implementing vision, mission, values and goals.[64] Strategic ambiguity does this by acknowledging the symbolic and dialogic nature of language and the multicultural bases for interpretation of meanings,

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[62]Bud Goodall, et al, *Strategic Ambiguity, Communication, and Public Diplomacy in an Uncertain World: Principles and Practices* (Arizona State University, 2006), 9.

[63]Eisenberg, E. M. et al., *Organizational Communication: Balancing Creativity and Constraint*, 5th ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press. (2006), 227-242.

[64]Ibid.

emphasizing Eric Eisenberg's concept of "unified diversity" which is essential to the creation of resilient organizations in complex environments.[65] There are five principles that enable Strategic ambiguity theory to apply to diverse audiences. These principles, outlined in Bud Goodall's paper "Strategic Ambiguity, Communication, and Public Diplomacy in an Uncertain World: Principles and Practices," could be applied to a new U.S. government strategic communication policy.

The first principal Goodall outlines is to **"**practice strategic engagement not global salesmanship: *Strategic engagement is the application of strategic ambiguity to public diplomacy goals."*[66] Demonstrating a willingness to dialog with the messages of other leaders, seeking to understand their position and acknowledge their concerns, without insisting on the "rightness" of our message, or pursuing immediate closure of an issue, enables two-way communication and meanings to emerge over time. For example, in the case of Arab culture, the greater amount of time spent discussing a topic indicates the seriousness each side has given to that subject. Of course, this is very different from the American tendency to "get to the point" so it is a technique that must be practiced.[67]

The second principal is not to repeat "the same message in the same channels with the same spokespersons and expect new or different results: *Repetition breeds contempt."*[68] Using a repetitious method to communicate with foreign audiences fails because it continues to deliver the same message without taking into account the meaning-making context of the intended audience. Replacing repetition with strategic engagement enables communicators to assess the

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[65]Weick, K., *Managing the Unexpected: Assuring High Performance in an Age of Complexity*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 10.

[66]Ibid. 10.

[67] bid.,10.

[68]Ibid.

context of their audience and alter their delivery method or their message to account for that context.[69]

Five Principals of Strategic Ambiguity

1. Practice strategic engagement not global salesmanship
2. Do not repeat the same message in the same channels with the same spokespersons and expect new or different results
3. Do not seek to control a message's meaning in cultures we do not fully understand
4. Understand that message clarity and perception of meaning is a function of relationships, not strictly a function of word usage
5. Seek "unified diversity" based on global cooperation instead of "focused wrongness" based on sheer dominance and power

Figure 2: Principals of Strategic Ambiguity
Source: Bud Goodall, et al, Strategic Ambiguity, Communication, and Public Diplomacy in an Uncertain World: Principles and Practices, 10-11.

Goodall's third principal warns the communicator to avoid seeking ". . . to control a message's meaning in cultures we do not fully understand: *Control over preferred interpretations is a false goal in a diverse mediated communication environment."* This concept is particularly difficult for American strategic communicators because they think they can reduce any obstacle with application of greater effort. The reality is that an inverse relationship exists between the control over a message's meaning and the understanding of the norms of the target audience. The less that is known about the target audience's culture, language, and religion, the less control that can be exerted on the meanings layered onto our strategic communication. This point reinforces the idea introduced in the first principal in that strategic engagement offers greater opportunities

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[69]Ibid.

to establish understanding and communication, vice those methods that attempt to control messages.[70]

In his fourth principal, Goodall emphasizes that "message clarity and perception of meaning is a function of relationships, not strictly a function of word usage: *Focus diplomatic efforts on building trust and credibility based on a longer term and deeper understanding of cultures, languages, and religions."* This principal posits that the key to successful communication is in the dialog established while building ongoing, long-term relationships that are receptive to the interpretations of target audiences. The willingness to acknowledge and adapt to audience interpretation is decisive to constructing productive messages that viewed as legitimate by the target audience.[71]

Goodall's final principal is to "seek 'unified diversity' based on global cooperation instead of 'focused wrongness' based on sheer dominance and power: *Recognize that shared meaning isn't the only goal, but shared principles and goals are singularly meaningful."* Strategic communicators need to learn to expect and cultivate multiple meanings of messages developed by foreign audiences, and to see them as opportunities. Essential to this idea is that through constant engagement, communicators can emphasize the parallels between the goals and ideals of the U.S. and the target culture, while reducing friction by being receptive to those audiences adapting and internalizing those messages according to their own needs and resources.[72] Ultimately, strategic ambiguity offers strategic communication policy a new and more effective alternative to the current message influencing model. Its goal is organized action to drive engagement and establish dialog, not just shared meaning between communicants.

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[70]Ibid., 11.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Ibid.

Another promising model, *pragmatic complexity,* comes from the perspective of new systems theory, specifically the communications theory of Niklas Luhmann.[73] Luhman's construct is that communication is not the act of one mind transmitting to another, but a complex system wherein participants interpret each other's actions and derive meaning from perceptions of the other's thoughts, motives, and intent. The system interaction is complex because unlike message influencing, which presupposes that individual A is transmitting to a passive individual B who is waiting to receive, pragmatic complexity assumes the relationship is one of simultaneous and mutual interdependence. [74] This *double contingency* is an important difference as it implies that there is constant interaction between the systems, and further, that each system affects the other as it interacts.

There are a few implications to be aware of because of this double contingency. First, delivery of the message begins the shaping of audience expectations. Thus, if the audience lacks confidence in the deliverer of the message, the message reinforces that lack of confidence, regardless of the actual nature of the information.[75] Added to this is an attribute of complexity, to wit, the emergent properties of systems--the mantra of the "whole being greater than the sum of its parts." As such, pragmatic complexity acknowledges that communication and engagement between groups evolves as it unfolds, and therefore is not under anyone's control. One implication of this understanding is that each system has effects of its own that can frustrate the best intentions of its members. Specifically, even messages sent and received clearly may not create the desired effect due to emergent understanding in the system.[76] This is why under the

[73]Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995, 25-32.

[74]Steven R. Corman, et al, "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas," 9.

[75]Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life,* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 256.

[76]Steven R. Corman, et al, "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas," 10.

message influencing model attempts to control the message are defeated –as repetition of an unaccepted message only serves to make the existing system stronger and undermine the credibility of the messenger. A second implication of pragmatic complexity is that the purpose of communication is not to influence the audience, as it is in message influencing, but to affect the audience system and perturb it, in an effort to overcome the tendency to interpret and attribute messages in its accustomed ways.[77] This effort forces a change in message reception. For example, as illustrated in previous sections, Muslim audiences interpret conventional diplomatic messaging from the U.S. as further examples of the U.S. not understanding Muslim norms and sensibilities, and as evidence of the West's efforts to impose secular norms. "Only behavior that undermines the existing framework is likely to bring about a different response. "[78]
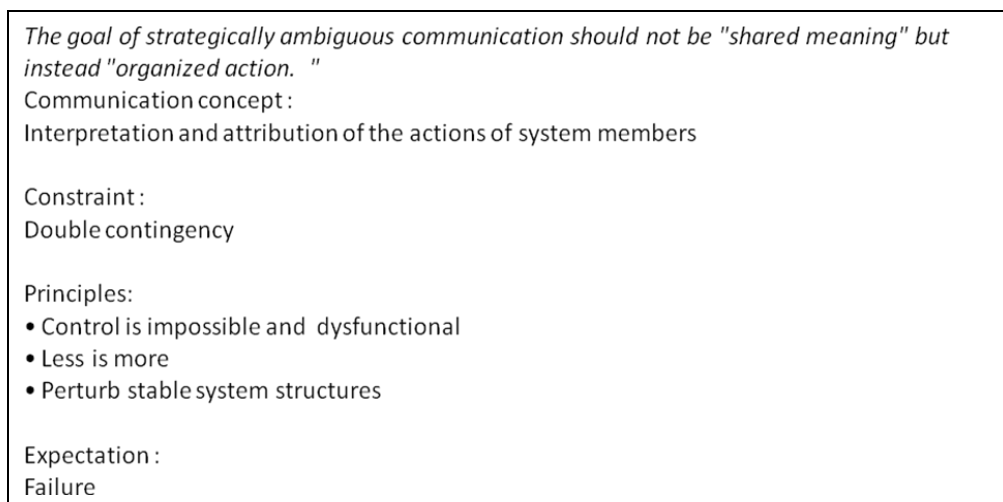

> The goal of strategically ambiguous communication should not be "shared meaning" but instead "organized action. "
> Communication concept:
> Interpretation and attribution of the actions of system members
>
> Constraint:
> Double contingency
>
> Principles:
> • Control is impossible and dysfunctional
> • Less is more
> • Perturb stable system structures
>
> Expectation:
> Failure

Figure 3. Pragmatic Complexity Model Summary
Source: Steven R. Corman, et al, "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas" Consortium for Strategic Communication, (April 3, 2007), available online at http://comops. org/article/114. pdf, (accessed 20 October 2009), 7.

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[77]Ibid., 11

[78]Ibid.

Due to the complexities of double contingency, it is difficult to proscribe a true paradigm shift. This leads to a third implication, which is that failure in effective communication is the norm. [79] This is markedly different from the message influence model, which assumes all things being equal and no degradation of the message pathways, that success is the norm. Due to the aforementioned passage of messages through context and framework, pragmatic complexity dictates that message delivered and message interpretation by the receiver will be significantly different. Operating from a premise that the delivered message will differ from transmitted message helps strategic communicators by reinforcing the need for multiple engagements and methods.

This leads to a final implication of pragmatic complexity, which is that *less is more* as the effects of messages are often delayed or unpredictable.[80] "…there is risk in having too many messages in play before their impact is fully understood. Furthermore, messages potentiate both identification with, and division from, the intentions of the sender, leading to perverse effects: A message might increase understanding, but it might also create misunderstanding." [81] Thus, strategic communication is an unpredictable and risky tool, and measures taken to plan accordingly for miscommunication.

Steven Corman lays out four principles of the pragmatic complexity model to use as benchmarks for strategic communicators. The first is deemphasizing control and embracing complexity. Corman emphasizes acceptance of the idea that in strategic communication the communicator no longer has control of the message once transmitted. Once communicators acknowledge the reality that there is no well-ordered system under their control, it frees up the ability to anticipate the potential in uncertainty--an exploitable aspect in opponents who have

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[79]Ibid.

[80]Jervis, Chapter 2.

[81]Steven R. Corman, et al, "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas," 11.

failed to acknowledge this complexity. The example of the Talibani strategic communicators in section one of this monograph (who rush to press with announcements regarding civilian casualties with video and narrative long before U.S. and NATO can respond) highlights this interaction. The Talibani strategic communicators acknowledge that once the message is out there is no control, but the advantage lies in their adaptability in delivering messages.[82]

1. Deemphasize control and embrace complexity.
2. Replace repetition with variation.
3. Consider disruptive moves.
4. Expect and plan for failure.

Figure 4: Principals of Pragmatic Complexity
Source: Steven R. Corman, et al, "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas" Consortium for Strategic Communication, (April 3, 2007), available online at http://comops. org/article/114. pdf, (accessed 20 October 2009), 11.

Embracing complexity lends itself to another powerful concept, captured in the second principal--replacing repetition of messages with variation. Corman's contention is that repeating a few simple messages is no more likely to work against complex communication systems than a plan "to always buy (and only buy) the same stock on Wall Street."[83] Rather than a strategy that concentrates on mass (same message over and over), communicators should rely on variations of a theme, thus approaching the target communications system from a number of approaches. Integral to this effort is a constant assessment of the effectiveness of each message variant in order to decide whether variants are effective or not. The end-state is a messaging methodology that adapts to the target audience in order to maintain engagement.[84]

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[82]Ibid., 12

[83]Ibid.

[84]Ibid.

One of the most radical concepts introduced by pragmatic complexity is the idea of disruption introduced in the third principal. Although variation has the potential to change a system through evolutionary steps, disruption has the potential to effect radical change over a short timeline. An example of this was the radical transformation that occurred in the U.S. because of the 9/11 attacks. Clearly, al-Qaeda was able to gain attention to its cause with its actions on 9/11 that until then had eluded them. In this case however, the disruption worked in favor of the Bush administration, by garnering support domestically and abroad, including transformations in national priorities, government programs, and military strategy. An example of a disruption of similar magnitude would be the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which would serve to deny al-Qaeda an important tenet of their grievances with the West.[85]

The last principal of pragmatic complexity is to expect and plan for failure in communication efforts, which is diametrically opposed to the presumption of successful communication found in message influencing. The communication systems identified by pragmatic complexity acknowledge multiple double contingencies, making it difficult to ascertain what effects will result for system interactions. As such, strategic communicators should tie themselves less to grand strategy and focus more on contingency planning. "Rather than assuming a message will be understood as it is intended, they should think of the ways things could go wrong, what the consequences of those outcomes will be, and the steps that might be undertaken in response."[86] This enables strategic communicators to maintain adaptability and flexibility to respond to poorly received messages, and react accordingly.[87]

The discussion in the preceding section should assure the reader that message influencing as a communication model is clearly a defunct theory that does not address the realities of the

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[85]Steven R. Corman, et al, "A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas," 13.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Ibid., 14

contemporary global communication environment. Strategic ambiguity and pragmatic complexity are two models that account for the dynamic nature of communication, including the effects of other cultural values, perceptions, norms, and double contingencies.

In order to appreciate the level of sophistication of the threat the U.S. faces in the arena of strategic communication, one only has to look at how Jihadi extremists are packaging and distributing their strategic communication to their audiences. The next section of this monograph will demonstrate how Jihadi strategic communicators have seized the initiative by using modern models and methods to deliver their message successfully.

Jihadi Extremist Strategic Communication and its Effectiveness

> We often speak disparagingly about our adversaries, but the reality is that when it comes to strategic communications they are very 21st century, and they are far more agile than we are. They tend to be able to operate inside our decision curve, and this is a big problem for us.
>
> Secretary of Defense Robert Gates

One of the most significant reasons why America has been losing the war of words is that just as the U.S. was doing away with its Cold War public diplomacy machine, Jihadi extremists inspired by Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda movement were mobilizing for their media war. In addition, they have three clear advantages that U.S. lacks; first, a clear message, second, a dedicated central agency responsible for the distribution of that message, and third an effective message model.

The Al Qaeda leadership, Osama Bin Laden and Ayman Al Zawahir, have been operating on a strategic vision and messages that have changed very little since they were first announced in 1998 (See appendix A, "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," World Islamic Front Statement). Generally, their goals, from short term to long term, include removing the U.S. presence from the Arabian Peninsula, destruction of the state of Israel, removal of apostate Arab governments, establishment of Islamic governance, and establishment of a Caliphate that governs all of the

historic Islamic lands previously occupied at the height of the Islamic Golden Age. The ultimate goal would then be to expand the Caliphate until the entire world submitted to the will of Allah.[88]

Whether these goals seem realistic or attainable to a Western mindset is irrelevant to the reality that exists in the Muslim world--these themes have cathartic appeal to Muslims who feel oppressed by the West and by current Arab governments. These powerful themes are incorporated into and emphasized by a Jihadi strategic communications effort that has been simple and consistent since its inception. In order to ensure it placed emphasis on its themes, al-Qaeda organized communication and media functions into its corporate structure.[89] In addition to having a military committee responsible for operations, and a political committee responsible for interacting with the wider Jihad movement, al-Qaeda established an information committee responsible for the communications of the organization, intelligence, and dissemination of the al Qaeda message.[90] The evolution of this information effort is instructive as it illustrates the sophistication and awareness of the al-Qaeda movement of the importance of strategic communication.

Until 1998, the primary means for Jihadi extremists to transmit the messages and world views was through traditional media engagements such as interviews, facsimile, face to face propaganda, and press conferences.[91] At the end of 1998 there was a shift in the communications means extremists used with the improvement of technology and more importantly, the

[88]Ayman Al-Zawahiri, "Knights Under the Prophet's Banner," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*,. 2 Dec 2001. Usama BinLaden, "JIHAD AGAINST JEWS AND CRUSADERS:World Islamic Front Statement, 28 February 1998." Assyrian Information Management Online, 28 September 2001, available online at http://www.atour.com/news/international/20010928b. html (accessed 20 October 2009).

[89]Steven R.Corman, et al., *Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas,* (Arizona State University, 2006), 5.

[90]Ibid.

[91]Carsten Bockstette, "Jihadist Terrorist Use of Strategic Communication Management Techniques," *Occasional Paper Series*. George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, no. 20, December 2008.

establishment of the Al Jazeera media network.[92] The Al-Jazeera television network became a

principal channel for broadcasting extremist messages, making Al Jazeera the go-to source for the

latest tapes and media releases on Jihadist positions and rhetoric in relation to U.S. and Western

activities.[93] In many ways, this signaled a phase shift in the world media from its role as a critical

observer and reporter to a more and more active role as a conflict participant.[94] Angela Gendron

quotes an al-Qaeda spokesman when describing this shift:

> Sheikh Usama knows that the media war is not less important than the military war
> against America. That's why al-Qaeda has many media wars. The Sheikh has made al-
> Qaeda's media strategy something that all TV stations look for. There are certain criteria
> for the stations to be able to air our videos, foremost of it has not taken a previous stand
> against the mujahedeen. That maybe explains why we prefer Al-Jazeera to the rest.[95]

After September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda demonstrated this media savviness by the expansion

of communication infrastructure and the subsequent introduction of the Al-Sahab (The Cloud)

Islamic Media Production Company -which has since become the principal entity of the media

division of al-Qaeda.[96] Al-Sahab relies heavily on the Internet, flooding the web with increasingly

more professional and sophisticated video messages that not only pass on the goals of the

movement, but invest a significant amount of time and energy on training and operational video.

Al-Sahab also appears to be the only "authorized" message center for al-Qaeda's senior

leadership, as all messages released since June 2006 carry the Al-Sahab logo.[97] As a result, Jihadi

themes have been remarkably consistent throughout the movements, as if there is a list of talking

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[92]Magdalena Wojcieszak, "Al Jazeera: A Challenge to the Traditional Framing Research," *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 69, no. 2, (2007), 115–128.

[93]Angela Gendron. "Trends in Terrorism Series: Al-Qaeda: Propaganda and Media Strategy," *ITAC Presents*, vol. 2007, 2, available online at http://www.itac-ciem.gc.ca/pblctns/tc_prsnts/2007-2-eng.asp (accessed 11 March, 2010).

[94]Guy Golan, 'Inter-Media Agenda Setting and Global News Coverage," *Journalism Studies,* 7 (2006), 2.

[95]Gendron.

[96]Bockstette.

[97]Ibid., 13.

points adhered to by the different leadership in various locations. An example of this in figure 5 shows a cross comparison between statements by Abu Abullah Al-Kuwaiti in 2002 and the echoes of those themes by Bin Laden in 2006.

Theme	al Kuwaiti 2002	bin Laden 2006
We seek direct dialog.	The statement/letter should be directed to the American people.	My message to you is about the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the way to end it.
We didn't want to fight you, but you have made us do it.	There is no animosity between us. You involved yourselves [Europe and US] in this battle. The war is between us and the Jews. You interfered in our countries and influenced our governments to strike against Muslims	Based on the above, we see that Bush's argument is false. However, the argument that he avoided, which is the substance of the results of opinion polls on withdrawing the troops, is that it is better not to fight the Muslims on their land and for them not to fight us on our land.
We easily penetrate your security measures.	The groups that are present in Europe and the US are above suspicion. We obtain our intelligence information from your government and intelligence agencies.	On the other hand, the mujahideen, praise be to God, have managed to breach all the security measures adopted by the unjust nations of the coalition time and again.
Your leaders are inept and/or corrupt.	Isn't it time to end American arrogance and begin listening to your people before you experience more devastating disasters?	Bush said: It is better to fight them on their ground than they fighting us on our ground. In my response to these fallacies, I say: The war in Iraq is raging, and the operations in Afghanistan are on the rise in our favour, praise be to God.
Things are getting worse for you and better for us.	I am pleased to inform you the billions you have spent fighting us so far have resulted in killing a small number of us.	Praise be to God, our conditions are always improving and becoming better, while your conditions are to the contrary of this.
We continue to plan attacks against you.	We warn you that our war against you has not ended, but its effects will increase.	Operations are under preparation, and you will see them on your own ground once they are finished, God willing.

Figure 5. Comparison of message theme consistency between Al- Kuwaiti and Bin Laden. *Source*: Steven R.Corman, et al., *Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas,* (Arizona State University, 2006), 9.

The bottom line is that the Jihadi extremist movement has used its media face to transmit consistent, recognizable messages to both its followers and its enemies since its entrance into mass media. Al Qaeda's propaganda efforts are largely winning the information war of the global current conflict. Every opportunity is used to highlight how the West is oppressing Muslims, and transgressing in Muslim lands. David Kilcullen highlights this with examples in his work

"Countering Global Insurgency: A Strategy for the War on Terrorism." "al-Qaeda issues a fortnightly propaganda bulletin on its official website, Sawt al-Jihad, and publishes a jihadist women's magazine, al-Khansa. Similarly, a flow of cassette tapes, videos and CDs, many depicting so-called 'martyrdom operations', terrorist bombings or the execution of infidel prisoners, moves throughout jihad groups worldwide."[98] "The Internet has become a potent tool for groups to share propaganda and ideological material across international boundaries, contributing to a shared consciousness among dispersed groups within the jihad."[99]

Al Qaeda's Internet savvy is not limited to propaganda. Terrorist and insurgent groups worldwide can access a body of techniques, doctrine, and procedures that exists in hard copy, and on the Internet, primarily in Arabic but also in other languages.[100] It includes political guidance, military manuals (like the encyclopedic Military Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants, discovered by Police in Manchester in 2002), and CD-ROM and videotaped materials. "In addition, Al Qaeda publishes a fortnightly online military training manual, Al-Battar."[101] This results in common solutions to tactical problems, and the ability to exploit successes by rapidly transmitting useful tactics to other regions.[102]

As stated in the introduction to this section, the last reason Al Qaeda messaging is so effective is because their model is tailored to their audience. They use sophisticated methods to plan and execute communication and media operations, demonstrating an appreciation of

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[98]David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency: A Strategy for the War on Terrorism," *Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory Small Wars Center of Excellence*, Canberra & Washington DC, (September - November 2004), available online at www.smallwars.quantico.usmc.mil/search/Articles/ CounteringGlobalInsurgency.pdf (accessed 20 October 2009) 9.

[99]Ibid.

[100]Ibid.

[101]Ibid.

[102]Ibid.

principles that align with modern methods of communication and public relations.[103] The scope of their public relations efforts may pale in comparison to the multi-million dollar efforts of large western public corporations, but their methods and effectiveness are similar. Analysis indicates evidence of audience segmentation and adaptation, use of tools of the trade, use of disinformation, and coordination of media with operations.[104]

Understanding their audience

"The most fundamental rule of any communication effort is to understand the audience…" notes Steven Corman in "Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas." Professor Corman goes on to highlight that Jihadi communicators have appeared to take this dictum to heart as they have regularly emphasized distinct cognitive concepts to delineate different enemies. One such distinction is between persons inside of and outside of the movement.

For *insiders*, communication problems revolve around the friction inherent in controlling an "amorphous, distributed, secretive organization and orienting everyone to common objectives.[105]

The *outsiders* are where the greatest effort and segmentation occurs, with the intent of tailoring each message for the most impact upon its audience. The *outsiders* are divided into categories (*good guys/bad guys*) based on whether they are redeemable or irreconcilable. *Good guys* are the good Muslims of the *Umma* (Arabic for community or nation) who provide material or emotional support to the movement. They are the people most often referred to by Jihadi extremists as the ultimate sufferers of the predations of the West – a point emphasized by the

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[103]Steven R.Corman, et al. "Communication and Media Strategyin the Jihadi War of Ideas," 11.

[104]Bockstette, 18.

[105]Ibid. 10

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Jihadis in an effort to bring more recruits into the fold. [106] *Bad guys* consist of *takfir* (apostate)

secular Muslim governments, unbelievers, "crusaders," Zionists, Jews, and the West, of which the

U.S. is the leader. [107] This group further segregates into the near enemy –*takfir* Muslim regimes,

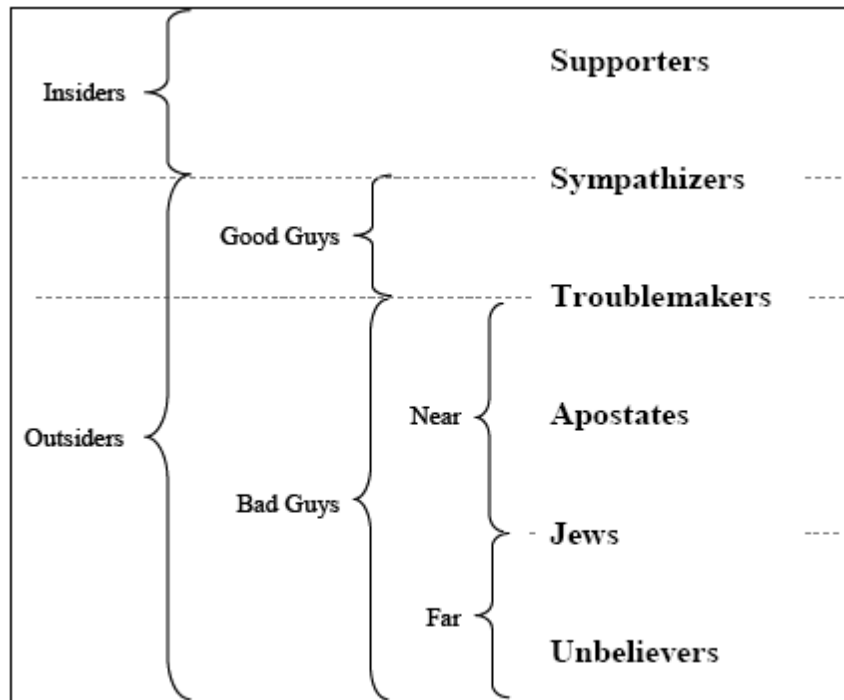and the far enemy -Jews, unbelievers, and Western society.

Figure 6: Jihadi Audience Concept
Source: Steven R.Corman, et al., *Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas,*
(Arizona State University, 2006), 11.

Al Qaeda and its associated movements have become more sophisticated in their

approach to strategic communication. While some propaganda messages transmit to broad

audiences, the majority are tailored to specific target groups. Messages, how they are

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[106]Ibid.

[107]Gendron.

communicated, and the languages they use are tailored to the unique needs of the target group. Jihadi extremists select and segment the strategically desired target audience, the transmitting medium, and the targets for destruction. They set the location and timing of their actions to satisfy media criteria for news worthiness that fit in with media deadlines and news cycles in order to reach the desired audience. Additionally, their strategic communication efforts feature the violent part of the operation for maximum effect. Thus, the Internet is becoming more and more important as a communication channel. It offers easy access, little or no regulation and censorship, potentially huge audiences, anonymity, and fast flow of information, all at relatively little expense.[108]

Recommendations and Conclusions

Clearly, as the last section demonstrated, the U.S. faces a determined and capable foe that has organized itself for the global war of words that has been ongoing now for over ten years. Despite numerous tactical and operational victories, the U.S. is in danger of remaining in a stalemate in the eyes of world opinion due to its fragmented strategic communication effort. In the interest of re-invigorating the U.S. Government's strategic communication effort, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Develop and declare a consistent, and *recognizable*, message based on a grand information strategy of the U.S. from which all strategic communication efforts flow. That strategy needs to emphasize democracy as a means to the end-states of freedom, liberty, and justice--conditions that the U.S. has advocated since its inception, not the apologist and neutral stance that the U.S. is currently attempting to use to "appeal" to

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[108]Gabriel Weimann, "How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," *Special Report 116,* United States Institute for Peace, (March 2004).

"moderate Muslims" which actually only serves to blur what America is attempting to achieve.[109]

2. Instead of the vagaries proposed in the National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication, a definitive policy needs to be set with a plan of action of how to execute National Strategic Communication. That policy then needs to have an executive branch agency responsible for the execution of that policy. Important to this recommendation is ensuring that this agency is stood up under the auspices of an enduring requirement, not as a contingency to the current conflict (like the USIA was stood up during the Cold War) so that Strategic Communication will become permanently institutionalized in the activities of the executive branch.

3. Tied to the recommendation above, is to resurrect the U.S. Information Agency as an independent, Cabinet level, agency responsible for all U.S. government messaging efforts abroad. The experiment in having components of the USIA answerable to Undersecretaries of State has clearly failed. Traditional diplomacy's emphasis on linear engagement with the leadership of foreign countries puts political and economic Foreign Service Officers at a disadvantage in understanding the subtleties of managing modern media engagement and interaction. A restored USIA, *with professional foreign service officers trained in strategic communication*, would then need to return to the work it so ably did during the Cold War –unabashedly shaping the strategic information landscape abroad in a manner that meets the U.S.' objectives.[110] Bringing back an agency responsible for engaging citizens of foreign countries on a personal basis by interacting daily with foreign media, by explaining

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[109]S. Enders Wimbush, "Perspectives for The New Administration: Fixing Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications, " Hudson Institute (8 January 2009), 3.

[110]Ibid.

U.S. policies, enabling access to U.S. leadership, and providing cultural exchanges would do more than all of the salesmanship of the Bush administration's attempted marketing and branding of America.[111]

4. Lastly, it is clearly time to rethink the message influencing model of communication. Message influencing is clearly ineffective as a meaning-making communications process, particularly in an age where perception and context of the audience constantly changes with alternate and contradictory messages. The U.S. Government must invest not just in an agency responsible for strategic communication, but must be willing to invest in hiring the best people from the private and public sector to design and execute strategic communication campaigns using the most modern techniques. Strategic ambiguity and pragmatic complexity are just two examples of alternate communication theories that can shape this effort –clearly there is room for research into the most effective ways to transmit meaning.

Conclusion

This paper argues the principle reason the U.S. is losing the war of words in the Global War on Terror is a lack of a coherent communications strategy that can oppose the messages of extremist Islam. In this monograph, the author demonstrated that the ineffectiveness of the U.S. effort is due to three principal causes. First, the U.S. lacks a coherent Strategic Communication policy. Second, merging the U.S. Information Agency with the U.S. State Department has degraded the effectiveness and synchronization of the U.S. government's strategic communication effort. Third, the U.S. has an outdated message model that assumes understanding by foreign audiences regardless of context and perceptions, aggravated by the perception that the U.S.' stated policies do not match its actions on the ground.

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[111]Ibid. 2

Due to resistance for change inherent in government, it may be politically tough to recreate an organization like the U.S. Information Agency and its lost programs. However, resistance to change did not prevent the reconstruction of the U.S. intelligence community, because the times urgently required it.[112] Contemporary global communications realities urgently require that the U.S. effectively and persuasively communicate its policies and ideals in a proactive manner, not as a reactive face-saving gesture. Constant engagement with strategic communications goals, driven by an agency of professional public diplomats, using the most modern communication models, is the way ahead.

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[112]John Hughes, "Needed: USIA's people-to-people message," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 December 2004, available online at http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1215/p09s01-cojh.html (accessed 21 February 2010), 1-2.

APPENDIX

Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders

World Islamic Front Statement

23 February 1998

Shaykh Usamah Bin-Muhammad Bin-Ladin Ayman al-Zawahiri, amir of the Jihad Group in Egypt Abu-Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Egyptian Islamic Group Shaykh Mir Hamzah, secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan Fazlur Rahman, amir of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh

Praise be to Allah, who revealed the Book, controls the clouds, defeats factionalism, and says in His Book: "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war)"; and peace be upon our Prophet, Muhammad Bin-'Abdallah, who said: I have been sent with the sword between my hands to ensure that no one but Allah is worshipped, Allah who put my livelihood under the shadow of my spear and who inflicts humiliation and scorn on those who disobey my orders.

The Arabian Peninsula has never -- since Allah made it flat, created its desert, and encircled it with seas -- been stormed by any forces like the crusader armies spreading in it like locusts, eating its riches and wiping out its plantations. All this is happening at a time in which nations are attacking Muslims like people fighting over a plate of food. In the light of the grave situation and the lack of support, we and you are obliged to discuss current events, and we should all agree on how to settle the matter.

No one argues today about three facts that are known to everyone; we will list them, in order to remind everyone:

> First, for over seven years the U.S. has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples.

> If some people have in the past argued about the fact of the occupation, all the people of the Peninsula have now acknowledged it. The best proof of this is the Americans' continuing aggression against the Iraqi people using the Peninsula as a staging post, even though all its rulers are against their territories being used to that end, but they are helpless.

> Second, despite the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the crusader-Zionist alliance, and despite the huge number of those killed, which has exceeded 1 million. . . despite all this, the Americans are once against trying to repeat the horrific massacres, as though they are not content with the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war or the fragmentation and devastation.

> So here they come to annihilate what is left of this people and to humiliate their Muslim neighbors.

> Third, if the Americans' aims behind these wars are religious and economic, the aim is also to serve the Jews' petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of 41

Muslims there. The best proof of this is their eagerness to destroy Iraq, the strongest neighboring Arab state, and their endeavor to fragment all the states of the region such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan into paper statelets and through their disunion and weakness to guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of the brutal crusade occupation of the Peninsula.

All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on Allah, his messenger, and Muslims. And ulema have throughout Islamic history unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries. This was revealed by Imam Bin-Qadamah in "Al- Mughni," Imam al-Kisa'i in "Al-Bada'i," al-Qurtubi in his interpretation, and the shaykh of al-Islam in his books, where he said: "As for the fighting to repulse [an enemy], it is aimed at defending sanctity and religion, and it is a duty as agreed [by the ulema]. Nothing is more sacred than belief except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life. "

On that basis, and in compliance with Allah's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, "and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah. "

This is in addition to the words of Almighty Allah: "And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? -- women and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from thee one who will help!'"

We -- with Allah's help -- call on every Muslim who believes in Allah and wishes to be rewarded to comply with Allah's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U. S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson.

Almighty Allah said: "O ye who believe, give your response to Allah and His Apostle, when He calleth you to that which will give you life. And know that Allah cometh between a man and his heart, and that it is He to whom ye shall all be gathered. "

Almighty Allah also says: "O ye who believe, what is the matter with you, that when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, ye cling so heavily to the earth! Do ye prefer the life of this world to the hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the hereafter. Unless ye go forth, He will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place; but Him ye would not harm in the least. For Allah hath power over all things. "

Almighty Allah also says: "So lose no heart, nor fall into despair. For ye must gain mastery if ye are true in faith. "

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